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ACTION ARA-20

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MEXICO 7855

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MX PINS
SUBJECT: FIGUEROA KIDNAPPING CASE

REF: MEXICO 7696

1. SUMMARY: FIVE DAYS AFTER FIGUEROA'S "LIBERATION" BY THE MEXICAN ARMY, LITTLE MORE IS KNOWN OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THAT EVENT THAN WAS REVEALED INITIALLY BY SEC. OF NATIONAL DEFENSE CUENCA DIAZ (SEE REF). HOWEVER, THE BITS AND PIECES THAT ARE AVAILABLE HAVE DONE LITTLE TO DISPEL DOUBTS AND QUESTIONS WHICH ARE REPORTED IN REF, AND INDEED TEND TO CONFIRM IMPRESSION THAT OFFICIAL GOM VERSION IS NOT WHOLE TRUTH. END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER FOUR DAYS OF DODGING REPORTERS SENATOR RUBEN FIGUEROA MADE HIS FIRST PUBLIC APPEARANCE BEFORE MEXICAN SENATE SEPTEMBER 12, WHERE HE GAVE 30 MINUTE NATIONALLY TELEVISED ADDRESS. APPEARANCE HAD ALL THE FANFARE OF A MINOR INFORME, COMPLETE WITH CAMPESINO BANDS OUTSIDE SENATE CHAMBER AND HERO'S WELCOME INSIDE.

3. TERMING "THE DETAILS OF MY CAPTIVITY SECONDARY" FIGUEROA DECLARED THAT THE GREAT LESSON OF HIS KIDNAPPING WAS THAT MEXICO HAD NO PATH TO FOLLOW BUT THAT OF

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INSTITUTIONS, FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW, RESPECT FOR POPULAR OPINION AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES. FIGUEROA SAID HE HAD GONE TO THE MOUNTAINS TO UNDERSTAND

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: SAM A. MOSKOWITZ
DATE/CASE ID: 27 JAN 1999 199800894

THAND THE "EXPATRIATES OF THE SIERRA." ACKNOWLEDGING FAILURE IN HIS MISSION, FIGUEROA NONETHELESS PROFESSED TO KNOW THE CHARACTER OF CABANAS (NOT MENTIONED BY NAME) -- COWARDLY, CRUEL, DICTATORIAL, AND DISRESPECTFUL TOWARD WOMEN AND LAZARO CARDENAS.

4. IN HIS INITIAL ENCOUNTER WITH "THAT PERSON", FIGUEROA SAID HE HAD TOLD CABANAS ALL THAT THE ECHEVERRIA ADMINISTRATION HAD DONE FOR THE STATE OF GUERRERO -- TRIPLING OF HIGHWAY SYSTEM, BUILDING 200 SCHOOLS, ETC. CABANAS, APPARENTLY UNIMPRESSED AND OVERRIDING OBJECTIONS OF SOME OF HIS FOLLOWERS, HAD TAKEN HIM CAPTIVE. FIGUEROA SAID HE AND HIS COMPANIONS HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO THE CRUELEST OF PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT.

5. FIGUEROA PRAISED ECHEVERRIA'S DECISION NOT TO DEAL WITH CRIMINALS AND BY NAME LAUDED HIS RESCUERS, FROM CUENCA DIAZ TO THE LT. COL. WHO HAD "PERSONALLY ACHIEVED" HIS RELEASE.

6. IN SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION WITH PRESS REPORTED BY EXCELSIOR, FIGUEROA GAVE A FEW ADDITIONAL DETAILS: A) IN AN EARLIER NIGHT SHOOTOUT BETWEEN HIS CAPTORS AND THE ARMY, FIGUEROA HAD REALIZED HE COULD HAVE FLED IN THE CONFUSION AND DETERMINED TO DO SO AT THE NEXT OPPORTUNITY; B) HE AND HIS FELLOW CAPTORS HAD BEEN FED TABLESCRAPS; C) CABANAS WAS SMALL, ROUND-FACED, MUSTACHIOED, AND ALWAYS WORE A LEATHER JACKET; D) CABANAS WAS INFESTED WITH LICE AND TICKS AND COMPLAINED CONSTANTLY OF MOSQUITOS; E) CABANAS'S GROUP AT TIMES NUMBERED 200; F) CABANAS HAD A HIGH OPINION OF HIMSELF AND HAD TAKEN THE TITLE OF "COMMANDER" OF THE REVOLUTIONARY FORCES; AND G) ONLY WHEN FIGUEROA TOLD HIS CAPTORS THEY OUGHT TO SHOOT HIM DID THEY BECOME CONCERNED AND IMPROVE CONDITIONS OF HIS CAPTIVITY.

7. ON SEPTEMBER 11, SEC. OF NATIONAL DEFENSE FIELDDED A FEW REPORTERS' QUESTIONS, STATING THAT THERE HAD OCCURRED AN EARLIER ENCOUNTER ON SEPTEMBER 7, (FIGUEROA MADE NO MENTION OF THIS). ACCORDING TO CUENCA DIAZ, CABANAS' GROUP

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SUFFERED TWO CASUALTIES ON THE 7TH, FIFTEEN ON THE 8TH. IN THE LATTER, FIGUEROA HAD JUMPED UP IN THE HEAT OF FIRE AND RUN MAKING HIS ESCAPE ACROSS 30 METERS DISTANCE SEPARATING THE TWO GROUPS.

8. NONE OF FIGUEROA'S COMPANIONS HAS BEEN INTERVIEWED BY THE PRESS AND THEIR EXACT WHEREABOUTS ARE NOT ALL KNOWN. CURIOUS PRESS MEMBERS REPORT BEING TOLD THEY'RE "ON VACATION" OR RESTING IN SECLUSION ON DOCTORS' ORDERS. AUTHORITIES HAVE CONFIRMED THAT LUIS CABANAS, COUSIN OF LUCIO WHO HAD

ACTED AS INTERMEDIARY IN ARRANGING THE INITIAL MEETING, WAS KILLED IN THE FINAL ENCOUNTER. THE "BANDITS" KILLED IN THE SEPT 8 SHOOTOUT HAVE ALL BEEN INTERRED.

9. ON SEPTEMBER 11 MEXICAN PRESS REPORTED POLICE RAID AND ARREST (DATE UNCERTAIN BUT PROBABLY SEPT 9 OR 10) OF EXTREME LEFTIST MAGAZINE PORQUE? EDITORS ROGER AND HERNAN MENENDEZ RODRIGUEZ (BROTHERS). ON SEPTEMBER 11 LIC. JOSE ROJO CORONADO, ATTORNEY WITH THE COMMITTEE FOR PHYSICAL AND MORAL DEFENSE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN MEXICO HELD PRESS CONFERENCE (PRIMARILY WITH FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS, OUR SOURCE OF INFORMATION) AT WHICH HE SPECULATED THAT REASON FOR RAID WAS INTENTION OF PORQUE? TO PUBLISH A DIFFERENT VERSION OF FIGUEROA RELEASE. HE STATED ALL COPIES OF NEXT ISSUE WERE SEIZED; (PORQUE? IS NOT AVAILABLE ON STREETSTANDS THIS WEEK.) FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS ALSO SOURCE OF INFORMATION THAT SUBSECRETARY OF PRESIDENCY FAUSTO ZAPATA ACKNOWLEDGED IN OFF-THE-RECORD SESSION THAT POLICE HAD ACTED "OUTSIDE JURIDICAL NORMS" IN MAKING RAID AND ARRESTS BUT MAINTAINED THAT REASON FOR ARRESTS WAS PROBABLE LINK OF PORQUE? WITH CABANAS GROUP.

10. COMMENT:

EMBASSY DOUBTS REGARDING VERACITY OF GOVERNMENT VERSION ARE HEIGHTENED BY THE SCANTY INFORMATION, SECLUSION OF FIGUEROA (AND HIS COMPANIONS) AND HIS ESSENTIALLY NON-INFORMATIVE SPEECH, AND FINALLY ARREST OF PORQUE? EDITORS AND IMPOUNDMENT OF FORTHCOMING EDITION.

WHILE FIRM BASIS FOR A DEFINITIVE JUDGMENT IS LACKING,
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EMBASSY IS CONVINCED THAT OFFICIAL VERSION HAS AT LEAST BEEN DOCTORED TO MAXIMIZE POLITICAL BENEFIT TO THE GOVERNMENT IN GENERAL AND THE MEXICAN ARMY IN PARTICULAR.
BRANDIN

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a
*** Current Classification *** [REDACTED]

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